

# Education for Sustainable Development

## A Vision Statement for the University of Reading

### Summary

Education for Sustainable Development is a key part of the experience at the University of Reading. While many universities have made progress with initiatives to “green” their campuses and reduce plastics, attempts to embed sustainability in the curricula have been less salient. ESD is specifically concerned with teaching and learning, and prepares students “to manage and shape the social, economic and ecological conditions characterised by change, uncertainty, risk and complexity” (Advance HE). It is of increasing importance to students; both current and prospective, as well as the worlds and contexts in which HE is intended to prepare them to operate. To this end many bodies responsible for teaching and learning enhancement in HE have presented guidance, including Advance HE and the QAA. ESD is also measured in an increasing number of metrics such as the UK People and Planet League. The ESD framework establishes a UoR approach to embedding ESD, highlighting the importance of four key aspects:

- **Becoming a world-leading institution for sustainability** learning and teaching, informed by research
- **Embedding ESD in-to the subject curriculum**, encouraging the application of subject knowledge and practices to develop an explicit understanding of the challenges facing the wider world
- **Empowering our students with the knowledge, skills, and attributes** to contribute solutions to global challenges in an equitable and just way. ESD also presents a clear opportunity to engage students in ways that are meaningful to them; using subject knowledge to address challenges that are of interest to the students’ academic, personal, and professional lives.
- **Ensuring that ESD is the business of all subjects** at the University but experienced in a way that is authentic to the discipline. This can be done by underpinning approaches to ESD with the UN SDG’s

## Demonstrating Impact

The framework will do two things –

1. Communicate the breadth of embedded activities undertaken across the University
2. Present the impact and benefits of each initiative

This requires a structured approach to presentation that features key elements:

- a. Aligned UN Sustainable Development Goals
- b. Good practice examples
- c. Implications for programmes (changes to assessment/pedagogy/community engagement)
- d. Application of research (where appropriate)
- e. Communication and engagement- videos, podcasts, media

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### **Embedding ESD:**

All students should leave the University with an understanding of sustainability, and how it applies to their subject. It is essential that the University delivers a wide range of activities, making opportunities available to students to engage with sustainability within the subject curriculum.

To reflect the embedded approach, ESD has influenced the redesign of the University's Curriculum Framework; recognising the importance of a "global and future facing outlook". The CF is the mechanism by which the University delivers academic excellence and supports the provision of an outstanding student learning experience. It aims to encourage a programme level approach to curriculum design, ensuring that key skills and attributes are developed through pedagogical strategies authentic to the discipline. The link between mastery of the discipline, capable graduates and effective teaching is critical.

ESD needs to be embedded within the subject curriculum, to enhance the understanding of the subject, and its application to meaningful problems. ESD is now a central pillar of the university's approach to delivering quality teaching and learning, and as such it has a key role to play in programme design and review, to ensure a positive student experience.

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**What is ESD:**

“Education for sustainable development (ESD) is the process of equipping students with the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations.” (The United Nations World Summit, 2005).”

This definition of ESD aligns with the UoR approach to employability, which aims to apply subject knowledge to real world issues. ESD adds a layer of social responsibility and means working with students to:

- Consider what the concept of global citizenship means in the context of their own discipline and in their future professional and personal lives.
- Consider what the concept of environmental stewardship means in the context of their own discipline and in their future professional and personal lives.
- Think about issues of social justice, ethics, and wellbeing, and how these relate to ecological and economic factors.
- Develop a future- facing outlook.
- Learning to think about the consequences of actions, and how systems and societies can be adapted to ensure sustainable futures (UKPPL).

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**ESD for all:**

ESD has implications for every subject at the University; both those traditionally associated with environmental practice and research, and those where the association is less explored. ESD principles are transferrable and can be applied across disciplines. Where students’ choices of university, and perception of course satisfaction is increasingly influenced by the approach to ESD, embedding it in to the curriculum and tying it to their understanding of their own subject enables students to apply subject specific knowledge in order to tackle key sustainability challenges and their implications. This embedded approach is aligned to the that of the UKPPL in that it is characterised by the proactive main-streaming of sustainability across the curriculum, in a way that meaningfully impacts the student experience.

Consider how subject knowledge, skills and abilities of your discipline be applied to better understand an issue in one of these categories. Can this be reflected in:

- Learning Outcomes
- Topics of study
- Case studies
- Projects
- Pedagogical strategy
- Assessment

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- Reflection

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**Structuring ESD:** Sustainability is a challenge experienced at scale, presenting a wide selection of social and scientific implications, unevenly affecting cultures and individuals. Students themselves experience these challenges across the spectrum, and the curriculum needs to reflect this in order to enable students to develop critical understanding. The language, knowledge, methods, and practices of the subject can be crucial in developing this understanding in a way which explicitly ties the subject to real world application. The 17 UN SDGs reflect the wide-ranging application of sustainability and can therefore be used as a foundation for developing a trans-disciplinary approach. They present a useful way of categorising sustainability issues and demonstrating the depth of the challenge to be tackled. They are interlinked and designed to help shape a better future for all. While each subject discipline may not align to every category, they present a breakdown of an issue otherwise too large to tackle and demonstrate where each subject can add value.

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UN Sustainable Development Goals - <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>